

# (TRAINING ROOM)

## KRAUSES' KORNER

with Ken Krause



**T**here are two kinds of players in the softball world: Those who have experienced a conflict between two of their coaches, and those who will.

Doesn't matter if it's your personal skills coach and a summer coach, a summer coach and your high school coach, or a high school coach and a Coach purse. Well, maybe the last one does matter. But no matter who the difference is between, it's you as a player who is caught in the middle and has to decide what to do. Lucky you.

So what do you do? That's hard to say. Generally when one of my students is caught in that situation, where some well-meaning but inexperienced team coach is telling her to do something that totally flies in the face of everything we've been working on in the off-season – and something that's sure to make her worse instead of better – I usually tell her to nod, say "okay" or "I'm trying" and then ignore it. I then tell her as a general rule the coach will eventually decide she's too stupid to get it and move on to ruining the next player. But I also tell them to make sure they perform on the field or we'll both look pretty bad.

The one thing you don't want to do is offer up the most despised statement in the softball world (next to "time limits have been reduced from 1:15 to an hour, drop dead) – "But my (other) coach told me to..."

If you're going to say that, you might as well go for the gold and say "Only a complete moron with the softball credibility of circus performer and the expertise of a motherless goat would tell me to do it that way" because essentially that's what your coach is going to hear. And believe me, calling your coach a circus performer or a motherless goat is no way to win playing time.

(Incidentally, the phrase "motherless goat" is this issue's obscure movie reference. See if you can guess where it's from. If you can't you can always Google it, you son of a motherless goat. That's a hint.)

Ok, back to the topic at hand. These sorts of conflicts in instruction are bound to arise now and then, because different coaches have different backgrounds and experience. Some learned what they learned 10, 15, 20 years ago and that's the way they plan to do it until the Big Umpire in the Sky calls them out for good. Others (such as yours truly) are constantly analyzing what they teach and making adjustments as they learn more and new discoveries are made. Still others never knew anything and are proud of it. You can't fix stupid.

Even among the middle group, the one that works at their craft all the time, there can still be disputes, particularly on the finer points. Not even the recognized experts agree on everything; if they did there wouldn't be a need for so many DVDs on how to hit, pitch, catch, throw, etc., and serious coaches would have more cash left in their bank accounts.

Which brings us back to that question – what do you do when there's a conflict in instruction? Part of the answer can be found in the words of that great statesman, softball coach and closet slave owner Thomas Jefferson, who once said, "In

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matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock." (I know Jefferson wasn't actually a softball coach, but with phrases like that he could've been. It makes more sense than a lot of what I hear coming from the mouths of softball coaches, especially in the post-loss harangue.)

Here's how Jefferson's quote applies to softball. There are some things that are a matter of style or preference in our game. For example, who acts as the cutoff on a ball to the outfield, who covers third on a bunt with a runner on first and whether it's ok to eat sunflower seeds in the dugout.

In those cases, you're best off swimming with the current, i.e. going with what this team's coach wants. You may think the base coverage or whatever that you use(d) on another team makes more sense, but it's not worth fighting over. This is a coaching decision, and the quickest way to find yourself with plenty of time to ponder how a man so adamant about freedom could keep slaves on his own plantation is to defy the coach's game scheme. Because you'll be on the bench, in case you hadn't figured that out.

When it comes to your skills, however, things are a little different. That's more a matter of principle, where you'll probably need to stand like a rock. After all, if you follow the coach's advice and it doesn't work, you'll wind up on the bench anyway. Maybe for the rest of your career. Just remember that a rock doesn't talk back.

It doesn't hurt to listen to what this coach is saying, though, because who's right on a given topic isn't a hard and fast rule either. Just because your private instructor played high-level fastpitch doesn't mean he/she knows what he/she did to be successful or how to teach it to others. I've seen plenty of examples where if an instructor had actually used the mechanics he/she teaches when he/she was playing, his/her career would've been a whole lot shorter. (And one more his/her for the road. We really need a non-gender specific singular word. Someone get to work on that.)

What you want to do is listen, ask questions, and compare the instruction to what you see top-level players do in games, and then follow that advice. Hopefully it's the advice of your private instructor since you're paying him/her. If it's not, then it's time to find a new instructor.

It's never fun being caught in the middle of Coach Wars. But when it comes up, and if it hasn't yet rest assured it will, the best thing you can be is informed so you can make a good decision. No matter what you decide, though, remember the words of the Tremeloes: Silence is Golden. And here you always thought the Four Seasons sang it originally.

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